

**West Mojave Plan
Steering Committee Meeting
June 12, 2000
Green Tree Inn, Victorville**

Attendees

Steering Committee Members: Jeri Ferguson, Eileen Anderson, Pete Kiriakos, Becky Jones, Lorlei Oviatt, Gene Kuleza, Lisa Northrup (for Randy Scott), Randy Scott (after 1:00 PM), Jeanette Hayhurst, Mike Connor, Tim Read, Mickey Quillman (for Mark Hagan)

Other Attendees: Paul Condon (California City), Robert Harick (Mines Exploration), Clarence Everly, Marie Brashear (at 11:00 AM)

West Mojave Team Staff: Bill Haigh, Chuck Bell, Valery Pilmer, Larry LaPre

Introduction

Bill Haigh opened the meeting and presented a proposed agenda as follows:

- Recap - Review Chapter 2 Revisions
- Task Group 1 - Reconvene
- Prescriptions

In regards to process, Bill suggested breaking into smaller working groups to bring issues and recommendations to the Task Groups and Steering Committee.

Review of Chapter 2 Revisions

Bill Haigh directed the group's attention to the handout titled "Part C - Conservation Strategy". This document included revisions made at the last Steering Committee meeting and also included staff's suggested names for the structural components of the plan.

Bill proposed that the combined tortoise and ground squirrel areas be called DWMA's (Desert Wildlife Management Areas), and that the tortoise portion of the DWMA be called Tortoise Reserves. Around the DWMA's, where determined necessary, Biological Transition Areas (BTA) would be established. Other lands not designated for tortoise conservation could be called the tortoise Incidental Take Area.

Considerable discussion followed regarding the various terms used.

Agreement was not reached regarding the use of the term Incidental Take Area for areas outside the reserves and BTA's. Peter Kiriakos (Sierra Club) felt the term was overly oriented

towards development while county representatives felt that the term was descriptive and appropriate. Since incidental take is allowed to some extent within all areas, including preserve areas, it was suggested that use of this term be reconsidered. **West Mojave Staff will take this under consideration and suggest other names for areas outside the preserves and BTA's.**

It was suggested that the use of the term DWMA be further expanded to include conservation areas for other species. Some felt that the use of the term DWMA for Ground Squirrel and other species preserves might be confusing, noting that the term is used in the Recovery Plan for the Desert Tortoise and in other HCP's to refer to conservation areas for the tortoise. It was also noted that use of the term "wildlife" for areas conserved for plant species may not be appropriate. Argument was made to maintain consistency with other plans in how DWMA is used. Some suggested that use of a different name would help distinguish this plan from the Recovery Plan. **The term Habitat Conservation Area (HCA) was suggested as an alternative to DWMA. The group agreed to recommend use this term to refer to all areas to be conserved for all species (all blue areas on the Conservation Area map).**

The group also discussed how to distinguish the next level down from the HCA's. Bill Haigh pointed out that we are forced into two levels within HCA's since there are different prescriptions for different species. Suggestions included defining areas by geographic region with multiple species within each region; using numbers to distinguish areas (i.e. HCA1, HCA2, etc.); and identifying areas by species. Use of geographic regions was considered problematic since local jurisdictions may not elect to obtain take permits for all species within a region. It was pointed out that use of GIS overlays makes defining areas by species possible despite the potential for overlap. Use of the term DWMA at this level for tortoise areas only would be consistent with other planning efforts. **The group agreed to recommend defining the next level within HCA's by species. Tortoise areas will be called Tortoise DWMA's. Other areas will be identified as the "[species] Conservation Area" (i.e. MGS Conservation Area, Barstow Woolly Sunflower Conservation Area, etc.).**

Bill focused the group's attention on page 2 of the proposed revisions to the Conservation Strategy, "Lands Outside of Tortoise Reserves". Group members expressed concern about the second sentence under "Removal Zones". This sentence states "Where tortoise sign is found or there is a reasonable likelihood that tortoises occur, construction activities should either be monitored or a tortoise-proof fence erected to preclude tortoises from the area of impact." Lorelei Oviatt pointed out that this issue has not yet been discussed or agreed to. Considerable discussion occurred about the degree of take avoidance measures necessary in areas outside preserves and BTAs. Some felt that because the area of take is so large, that take avoidance measures are needed. Others felt that removal surveys are appropriate but questioned whether more is needed. **The group agreed to break for lunch in order to think about this issue and caucus with others.**

The group also discussed the status of the Arroyo Toad given USFWS's recent proposed designation of Critical Habitat for the toad. Larry LaPre explained that the primary areas for the

toad in the West Mojave planning area are Summit Valley and Little Rock Creek. He also indicated that Ray Bransfield, USFWS, recommended the Arroyo Toad not be included in the West Mojave Plan and that a separate HCP be developed for Arroyo Toad habitat in Summit Valley. The City of Hesperia is embarking on a separate HCP for this area. Becky Jones commented that critical habitat is also proposed at the 1-15 crossing of the Mojave River. **It was recommended that the Arroyo Toad be added to the West Mojave Plan species list to allow further review during Chapter 4 discussion.**

Other points raised during the discussion included:

- The write up is oriented to public lands. It needs to better address how private land within HCA's will be handled, including clarification that take up to 1% is allowed on private land in DWMAs.
- Need to clarify that for BLM land, DWMA's (now HCAs) will be designated ACECs.
- The mining community does not agree with applying the 1% cap in the DWMA to mining activities.
- The write up needs to be less narrative and more nuts and bolts and explanatory.
- Add "side bar" definitions and graphics. Technical terms need to be explained early on.

Lunch Break - 12:00 AM to 1:00 PM

Bill Haigh explained that he was able to contact Ray Bransfield during lunch regarding the level of take avoidance needed in areas outside the Tortoise DWMAs and BTAs. Ray indicated that there are certain areas outside of the DWMAs where tortoise density remains high but because of urbanization, geography, or preponderance of private lands, were not appropriate for inclusion within DWMAs. He identified Brisbane Valley, Hinkley, and areas around Yucca Valley and Joshua Tree as areas where additional take avoidance measures are appropriate. He did not feel such measures were necessary in all areas outside DWMAs and BTAs.

Becky Jones pointed out that most of these higher density areas are adjacent to the DWMAs and could be identified as BTAs, with the possible exception of the Brisbane Valley. Bill Haigh indicated that transitional areas outside of the preserves could assist the DWMAs as tortoises recover with genetic continuity, recruitment and edge habitat.

Pete Kiriakos clarified that his constituency is interested in conservation where possible outside the DWMAs. The remainder of group members indicated they are interested in avoiding take in these areas. The primary concern is the degree of measures needed to avoid take.

The group conceptually agreed to expand the BTAs to include areas where high tortoise density exists. The take avoidance measures to be recommended would be discussed at a future meeting.

Staff agreed to do the following

- **Bring back a map delineating the proposed BTAs.**
- **Prepare a matrix showing the various titles of areas and the take avoidance measures recommended.**
- **Update the map series (blue blob map, tortoise density map, etc.) to ensure the boundaries match.**
- **Provide new land acreage calculations.**

Task Group 1 Discussion

The group discussed input from Task Group 1 members. Although the Task Group is awaiting information from the Steering Committee, and is eager to begin meeting again, there is a willingness to wait a bit longer for the Steering Committee to complete its work.

The group discussed whether to submit a revised Evaluation Report to Task Group 1 for their consideration or write a new report. **The group consensus was to present the Steering Committee Recommendations as a new report incorporating the Biological Goals from the Draft Evaluation Report, leaving the Draft Evaluation Report as is.**

Next Steering Committee Meeting

July 11, 2000 at 9:30 AM at the Victorville Green Tree Inn. An additional meeting was scheduled for August 9, 2000.

Possible Dates for Task Group 1 Meeting

Wednesday July 26th or Thursday, July 27th.

Homework for Steering Committee Members

Subcommittees were established to identify issues and possible ways to resolve those issues. The subcommittees will submit their reports to Bill Haigh by July 3 to allow for distribution to Steering Committee members prior to the next meeting. The subcommittees are as follows:

- **Minerals:** Gene Kuleza, Ray Bransfield and Rob Waiwood (BLM). The group will consider mining prescriptions and the 1% disturbance cap within DWMAs
- **Recreation:** Jeri Ferguson, BLM Staff (Harold Johnson or Dave Wash), Eileen Anderson
- **Agriculture:** Lorelei Oviatt, Mike Connor
- **Cattle Grazing:** Mike Connor, Dave Fisher (an invitation will be extended) and Larry Morgan (BLM)
- Utilities will be discussed by the entire group.

